

Gideons International

Gideons International is an evangelical Christian association founded in 1899 in Wisconsin. The Gideons' primary activity is distributing copies of the Bible free of charge. This Bible distribution is a global enterprise taking place in 200 countries, territories and

possessions. The association's members focus on distributing complete Bibles, New Testaments, or portions thereof. These copies are printed in over 100 languages. The association is most widely known for its Bibles placed in hotel and motel rooms. The Gideons also distribute to hospitals and other medical offices, schools and colleges as well as jails and prisons. The association takes its name from the Biblical figure Gideon depicted in Judges 6.

The Gideons International



Founded July 1, 1899

Founder Samuel E. Hill
John H. Nicholson
William J. Knights

**Tax ID
no.** 36-2270051

Location P.O. Box 140800, Nashville, TN
37214-0800

Members 300,000+ Gideons and Auxiliary
members (wives of Gideons)

**Key
people** Craig Warner (Executive Director)
Gregory Hing (Chairman)

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Revenue | \$128,835,615 (2012) |
| Website | www.gideons.org |

The Gideons began distributing free Bibles, the endeavor for which it is chiefly known, in 1908, when the first Bibles were placed in the rooms of the Superior Hotel in Superior, Montana. Members of The Gideons International currently distribute over 80 million Scriptures annually, and the numbers are growing, especially in places like Brazil, India, and Asia. On average, more than two copies of the Bible are distributed per second through Gideons

International.^[1] In late April 2015, Gideons distributed their historic two billionth Scripture. The distribution of the first one billion Bibles and New Testaments by Gideon members spanned 93 years (1908 to 2001). The second billion was attained in less than 14 years (2002 to 2015).^[2]

The headquarters of Gideons International is in Nashville, Tennessee.

History





The interior of Room 19, Central House Hotel, Boscobel, Wisconsin, kept in the style it was in 1898 when the founders of the Gideons met there

The organization began in fall 1898, when two traveling salesmen, John H. Nicholson of Janesville, Wisconsin, and Samuel E. Hill of Beloit, Wisconsin, met in a hotel room they shared at the Central House Hotel in Boscobel, Wisconsin, where they discussed the formation of an association.^{[3][4]} In May

1899, the two met again in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, where they decided the goal of their association would be to unite traveling salesmen for evangelism.^[4] In July, 1899, Nicholson, Hill, and Will J. Knights met at the YMCA in Janesville.^{[5][4]} Two of them continued with the distribution of the Bibles.^[6] Gideons began distributing free Bibles, the work they are chiefly known for, in 1908, when the first Bibles were placed in the rooms of the Superior Hotel in Superior, Montana.^[7]

The organization describes its link to

the story of Gideon:

Gideon was a man who was willing to do exactly what God wanted him to do, regardless of his own judgment as to the plans or results. Humility, faith, and obedience were his great elements of character. This is the standard that The Gideons International is trying to establish in all its members, each man to be ready to do

God's will at any time, at any place, and in any way that the Holy Spirit leads.

In keeping with this symbolism, the symbol of the Gideons is a two-handled pitcher and torch recalling Gideon's victory over the Midianites as described in Judges, Chapter 7.

In addition to their well-known hotel room Bibles, members of The Gideons International also distribute Bibles to members of the military of various

countries, to hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, MPs and students. A typical Bible or New Testament from The Gideons International contains:

- a short preface;
- a pamphlet suggesting Bible verses that may be of assistance in various sorts of trouble;
- translations of John 3:16 into a variety of languages and scripts;
- the Bible text itself, without notes, references, or any other reference matter other than chapter and verse headings; this can either be the full

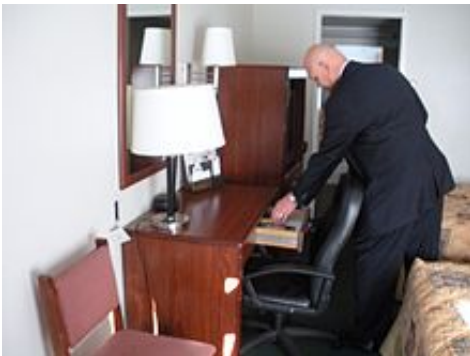
Bible (typical of the copies placed in hotel rooms), or just the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs (typical of the copies handed out as gifts to individuals);

- a short description of the evangelical understanding of salvation, with biblical quotations, and a place for the reader to sign and date their confession of Jesus as their savior (this is especially common in the shorter editions featuring the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs).

Membership

Membership is limited to current or retired business or professional men aged 21 or older who are members in good standing of an evangelical or Protestant church.^[8] Wives of Gideons may join the Gideons International Auxiliary.

Colors of Testaments distributed



A Gideon member placing a Bible in a motel room

The covers of the New Testaments distributed by Gideons are color-coded based on which groups they are meant for:

- Orange: given in sidewalk distribution^[9]
- Green: for college/university students
- Red: for in-school distribution to Middle/High school students
- Digital Camouflage/Desert Camouflage: for the military^[9]

- Dark blue: printed in a foreign language^[9]
- White: for medical professionals
- Light blue: for distribution by the Auxiliary only^[9]
- Brown: for facilities distributions, (for witnessing in prisons and jails by Gideons)^[9]
- Burgundy: personal worker's testaments (for individual witnessing by Gideons)^[9]
- Periwinkle: personal worker's testaments (for individual witnessing by the Auxiliary)

During World War II there were Military Issued New Testaments, brown for Army and blue for Navy distributed by the Gideons. In addition to the Desert Camouflage and the Digital Camouflage, there are also Woodland Camouflage editions for the Military.^[10]

Distribution of Bibles during school hours



A Gideon New Testament

The distribution of Bibles on school grounds has been an issue because of the U.S. Supreme Court's interpretation of the Establishment Clause in the Constitution. Five Supreme Court cases discuss this issue: Everson, McCollum, Zorach, Engel, and Schempp.^[11]

In 2008, Americans United for Separation of Church and State brought suit against the South Iron R-1 School District in Missouri for allowing the Gideons to distribute Bibles during

class time.^[12] In 2009, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis upheld a lower court ruling that found the South Iron district's distribution of Bibles to the schoolchildren in their classrooms was unconstitutional. An "attorney representing the South Iron School District in Annapolis, Mo., said the decision allows a new policy to finally be implemented, one that allows any group to hand out literature at the rural district, including information on how children can obtain Bibles."^{[13][14]}

The Gideons International continues to

contact youth in America through The Life Book, coordinating with churches and their youth to distribute copies of the Bible in high schools.^[15] The Alliance Defending Freedom, as of 2013, maintains that there are "constitutionally permissible ways in which Gideons Bibles may be distributed," and attorneys Rory Gray and Jeremy Tedesco write that the Alliance Defending Freedom sent letters to 174 school districts in Kentucky stating: "Federal caselaw overwhelmingly supports the decision to grant religious and non-religious

community groups an equal opportunity to provide literature to willing students."^[16] In early 2014, the "Gideons International again distributed Bibles at a public elementary school in Kentucky."^[16]

The tradition of Gideons handing out small New Testaments continues in many British secondary schools. Some schools have banned Gideons.^[17]

See also

- [The Pocket Testament League](#)
- [Protestantism](#)

References

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2. *"Gideons distribute historic 2 billionth Bible"* . The Gideons International. Retrieved April 1, 2016.
3. Edward E. Hindson, Daniel R. Mitchell. *The Popular Encyclopedia of Church History: The People, Places, and Events That Shaped Christianity*. Harvest House Publishers, 2013, p. 156.
4. The Gideons International. *About Us* .
5. George Thomas Kurian, Mark A.

Lamport, Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States, Volume 5, Rowman & Littlefield, USA, 2016, p. 962

6. *Cornerstone of Religious Freedom in America*

7. "Christianity in the News" .

Workersforjesus.com. Retrieved November 10, 2011.

8. *Gideons International. Frequently Asked Questions*

9. *Hersh, Iris (19 March 2009). "Gideons celebrate a century of evangelism" .*

Chambersburg Public Opinion. Archived from the original on 22 June 2014.

Retrieved 22 June 2014. "The deep blue cover means it was printed in a language other than English; brown testaments are given to someone personally; orange testaments are given to a stranger on the sidewalk; testaments with camouflage or dark green covers are intended for the military; and the auxiliary gives out light blue testaments."

10. *"The Gideons International"* . The Churchman. Churchman Company. **155**. 1941. "Distribution to the United States Army and Navy of a million copies of a vest-pocket size New Testament and

Psalms, in a service edition, is planned for this year by Gideon's International. The book, which is published by the National Bible Press, Philadelphia, includes the Lord's prayer, a selection of national anthems and hymns, and sixteen pages of special help. It is bound with "Fabrikoid" pyroxylin-coated fabric in brown for army use, in blue for the navy, and in white for Hawaiian forces."

11. The five cases are Everson v. Board of Education Ewing Township, 330 U.S. 1 (1947); Illinois ex rel. McCollum v. Board of Education 330 U.S. 203 (1948);

Zorach v. Clauson 343 U.S. 306 (1952);
Engel v. Vitale, 370 U.S. 421 (1962); and
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12. "Missouri Public School Must Stop
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13. Jim Salter (July 17, 2009). "State

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14. "The Public Schools and the Bible" .
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15. Beth Patch, "No High School Student
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16. Weber, Katherine (14 May 2014).
"ACLU Says School District's Bible
Distribution Steps Onto 'Shaky

Constitutional Ground' " . The Christian Post. Retrieved 22 June 2014. "In response, the Christian legal group Alliance Defending Freedom sent its own letter to the school districts, disagreeing with the ACLU's claims that the Bible distribution was unconstitutional. "We write to correct several misrepresentations made in the ACLU's letter and to inform you that allowing religious community groups, like the Gideons, to distribute literature at tables in the school hallways or by the entrances and exits on an equal basis with their secular counterparts

fully complies with the Establishment Clause," the letter read. "Indeed, banning only religious community groups from distributing literature at public schools is clearly forbidden by the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment." The Gideons International again distributed Bibles at a public elementary school in Kentucky earlier this year."

17. *"Anger as schools ban Gideon Bibles to avoid upsetting other faiths"* .

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External links

- [The Gideons International official site](#)
- ["Profile of Gideons International"](#) . *MinistryWatch.com*. 2012. Archived from [the original](#) on August 18, 2012. Retrieved August 7, 2012.

Retrieved from

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